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SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 14th MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Monday, 30 June 2003, at 3 p.m.

President: Mr. ROSENTHAL (Guatemala)

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PROMOTING AN INTEGRATED APPROACH TO RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES FOR POVERTY ERADICATION AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.

PROMOTING AN INTEGRATED APPROACH TO RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES FOR POVERTY ERADICATION AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT (E/2003/33, E/2003/51 and E/2003/NGO/1)

Ministerial round tables

The PRESIDENT declared the high-level segment open and said that it would begin with a series of ministerial round tables. He invited the chairpersons briefly to introduce the themes for discussion.

Mr. DESAI (Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs) said that three main points would be made within the round table on "Natural resources and rural development in developing countries". First, the fight against poverty was a comprehensive process, which not only aimed to increase household income but also took into account all aspects of human development: health, food security, community involvement, etc. Secondly, programmes for combating poverty aimed not only at providing assistance but also enabling the poor - the majority of whom lived in rural areas where the environment was often fragile - to fulfil their potential. If the number of people living in poverty really was to be halved by 2015, it was imperative to invest in the resources essential for agricultural development - land, water, infrastructure, etc. - areas from which donors had withdrawn during the past decade. In other words, only a real land use policy could reduce poverty. Thirdly, the international community had reaffirmed that the fight against poverty must give priority to development and growth. It was therefore essential to ensure that the undertakings made in Doha, Monterrey and elsewhere were now translated into concrete results.

Mr. DIOUF (Director-General, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations) stressed that 70 per cent of poverty-stricken people lived in rural areas and were dependent upon agriculture. However, the proportion of ODA devoted to agriculture had fallen by 50 per cent between 1990 and 2000. If the trend was not reversed, it would be impossible to reach the target of halving the number of people living in poverty before 2150! The strategy for agriculture must therefore be completely revised and, above all, the investments needed to

combat the main causes of hunger and lack of food security must be made. In the case of southern and eastern Africa, the international community had distributed $1 billion of food aid in 2002 in order to avoid a famine caused primarily by drought, but at the same time there had been no investment with the aim of improving the management of water resources. In Africa, only 1.6 per cent of water potential was being used, as opposed to 14 per cent in Asia. Also, only 3.8 per cent of arable land in Africa was irrigated as opposed to an average of 40 per cent in Asia.

Regarding international trade - another essential aspect of the fight against poverty - changes must indeed be made in order to afford LDC products new access to markets, but those countries must also be enabled to benefit fully from the opening-up of markets, which led back to the question of developing rural infrastructure.

Ms. HERFKENS (Executive Coordinator, Millennium Development Goals Campaign) said that the round table on the millennium development goals would highlight the multidimensional nature of rural development, and hence the need to intervene simultaneously in the eight areas concerned. The goals for education and health could only be met by implementing policies such as decentralization and community involvement, in order to improve the rural population's access to such services. One of the prerequisites for rural development was the empowerment of women, as rural women were both the most vulnerable members of society and also the most effective agents of change. The management of natural resources for environmental protection was another objective which could not be ignored if there was to be long-term action to combat poverty in rural areas. Lastly, the establishment of global partnerships, the eighth millennium development goal, called for thought to be given to the means of increasing ODA flows assistance to agriculture, while enabling agricultural products to be exported from developing countries by redefining trade regulations. The latter goal required action primarily from the rich countries.

Mr. MORRIS (Executive Director, World Food Programme) stressed the need to invest in agriculture and noted with satisfaction that certain donors, notably the United States and the United Kingdom, had recently increased their financial commitments to rural and agricultural development. That notwithstanding, there were still nearly 800 million people who were chronically hungry - an unacceptable number in a world of plenty. Eradicating hunger was not

only essential for humanitarian reasons; it was also necessary for sustainable development. Hunger jeopardized the growth and future of individuals and societies alike, and had a negative impact on rural development. To preserve the achievements of recent decades, therefore, it was necessary to increase the proportion of developing countries' national resources and international aid devoted to agriculture and rural development. At the same time it was necessary to implement vigorous and creative programmes of direct assistance to the hungry. It was to be hoped that the current discussions would bring about a new consensus on the role of food aid for development.

Mr. BÅGE (President, International Fund for Agricultural Development) said that the round table on global partnerships for rural development must highlight the holistic and multidimensional nature of the fight against poverty and hunger, a fight that required concerted efforts, based on national resources and priorities as defined in the poverty reduction strategy documents.

The round table would provide an opportunity to tackle trade issues and also other relatively neglected subjects, such as remittances of wages by immigrant workers, which amounted to twice the flow of ODA. Direct foreign investment and debt relief also deserved attention. Lastly, a joint approach to problems and consistency of procedures were both essential if global partnerships were to achieve the millennium development goals.

Ms. RAMPHELE (Managing Director, World Bank) said that global partnerships had four aims: to create an institutional and juridical framework conducive to the efficient operation of markets, companies and farms; to promote public sector/private sector cooperation in reducing the cost of transactions; to empower disadvantaged groups, including women, small farmers and marginalized persons, by improving their access to markets and developing their capacity to benefit from the opportunities created by globalization; to support the opening-up of markets to agricultural products from developing countries.

The round table should endeavour to answer the following three questions: how to make development assistance more effective; what strategies to implement in order to facilitate a shift in both domestic and foreign investment to rural areas; and how to reduce obstacles to trade so as to bring about genuine liberalization.

Ms. TIBAIJUKA (Executive Director, UN-HABITAT) said that the purpose of the round table on rural/urban interface and slums was to bring home to participants the fact that rural development strategies were doomed to failure if they did not take urbanization into account. While more than 60 per cent of the people in developing countries lived in rural areas, an increasing number were cramming into the towns and new megalopolises, mainly living in slums. No continent was free from the irreversible phenomenon of rapid urbanization. There was an urgent need for development strategies which were not based on a dichotomy between rural and urban areas and endeavoured to promote balanced regional planning, viewing towns as growth nodes around which rural development took place. Reinforcing the complementarity between urban and rural areas was the key to sustainable rural development and controlled urbanization.

Mr. MAGARIÑOS (Director-General, United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO)) noted with satisfaction that, in his report (E/2003/51), the Secretary-General clearly reflected the preparatory discussions in which UNIDO had actively participated. UNIDO attached great importance to the fact that, in order to achieve the goals set out in the Millennium Declaration, the least developed countries would have to achieve annual growth rates of 5 per cent from the present time until 2015. Even given good governance, appropriate institutions and sufficient investment, they could not achieve such a growth rate without restructuring their production and export systems, inter alia by developing rural non-farm activities and promoting decentralized industrial development. Emphasis therefore needed to be placed on strengthening productive capacities through micro, small and medium enterprises, with a view to promoting sustainable local markets.

The round tables should study concrete cases using all available instruments. He drew attention in that regard to the importance of remittances of wages, to which the President of IFAD had referred.

Ms. OBAID (Executive Director, United Nations Population Fund) said that, in order to be effective, rural development must be considered in a gender-sensitive manner, since women constituted the majority of rural poor, as well as playing an important role in agricultural

production and food security. Efforts were therefore needed not only to strengthen the rural economy, but also to empower women by broadening the range of their opportunities and individual choices. They must, in particular, be given access to land, water, training, credit, markets and decision-making. They also needed improved access to reproductive health services, notably maternal health care, family planning and AIDS prevention methods, in order to reduce the maternal mortality rate, which was very high in rural areas. Although HIV/AIDS was ravaging rural communities and affecting an increasing number of young women, irresponsible sexual behaviour still prevailed. Donor countries must therefore increase their financial support for developing countries, and in particular least developed countries, in order to improve reproductive health services, slow population growth and reduce poverty. Investing in reproductive health and gender equality was a cost-effective way of improving the lives of all, especially the rural poor.

Mr. COSTA (Executive Director, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime) said that, although it was not always clear, there was a link between sustainable development, which required above all an integrated approach to rural development, and the fight against drugs, organized crime and corruption. Despite relatively little land being used for growing drug crops, the consequences of that activity (crime, trafficking, laundering considerable sums of money to fund subversive activities, and even terrorism) jeopardized peace and security in many countries and undermined entire economies. Drug-growing should therefore be eliminated by offering sustainable revenue opportunities to those involved. A crop substitution strategy did not mean simply destroying crops and replacing them, but also supporting a wide range of development initiatives at the same time (providing basic social services and offering rural credit, re-establishing the rule of law and sound governance) in order to offset income loss and prevent a return to, or shift in, drug production. The international community could not shirk its responsibilities in that field.

Mr. GAMBARI (Under-Secretary-General and Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on Africa) said that rural development, which was at the very heart of sustainable development efforts, required a coordinated response taking into account factors such as land, water, deforestation, market access, etc. That was particularly true of Africa, which was

suffering from the combined effects of AIDS and environmental degradation, and where multilateral cooperation for rural development needed to be strengthened in conjunction with local initiatives.

Rural development was a priority within the framework of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). For the sake of consistency, NEPAD called for multilateral and bilateral development institutions to base their activities on African priorities, to simplify and harmonize their procedures, to coordinate their assistance more effectively, concentrate it on a few specific projects, and achieve greater coherence between NEPAD priorities and the millennium development goals. Coherence was not a goal in itself, but rather a strategy for helping Africa to achieve sustainable development and so improve people's lives. It would be difficult to achieve the millennium development goals if the development needs of the rural poor, particularly women and children, were not given priority.

Mr. CHOWDHURY (High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States) stressed that rural development was particularly important for the least developed countries (LDCs). The Brussels Programme of Action for the LDCs for the Decade 2001-2010 contained specific recommendations for rural development and food security. As the Secretary-General stated in his report (E/2003/51), a reversal of the decline in the proportion of ODA going to agriculture and rural areas was vital, and debt relief for LDCs was an important means of mobilizing resources for poverty eradication in rural areas. The rural poor in LDCs must also be given better access to productive assets and financial services. Rural development empowered poor people by improving their access to education, health, resources, markets and decision-making. Comprehensive and sustainable rural development was impossible without the empowerment of women, who played a very special role as users and managers of natural resources. Genuine partnership between all stakeholders, particularly civil society and NGOs, and strengthened cooperation between public and private enterprises were crucial for an integrated approach to rural development. Poverty eradication and food security should be more systematically integrated into poverty reduction strategy papers, common country assessments and the United Nations Development Assistance Framework. International cooperation in rural development could help reduce the vulnerability of LDCs and accelerate their socio-economic development.

The PRESIDENT thanked the speakers for their introductory statements and invited participants to go to the various meeting rooms where the round tables were due to begin.

The meeting was suspended at 4.15 p.m. and resumed at 6.25 p.m.

The PRESIDENT invited the chairpersons of the four round tables to summarize the discussions.

Natural resources and rural development in developing countries

Mr. MOOSA (South Africa) said that a consensus had quickly emerged on the close connection between rural development and the management of natural resources and thus on the need to improve policy integration in those two areas. Food security had been discussed at length, with some speakers not hesitating to describe malnutrition and hunger as "weapons of mass destruction". As forests were an important natural resource, the communities living in them should be more closely involved in the development of forestry protection policies, and techniques should be developed to enable forestry to become a tool for sustainable development. That would entail making bolder use of indigenous people's knowledge and traditional techniques for managing natural resources. At the same time, farmers should be given a greater say in the decision-making process.

Integrated approach to the implementation of the millennium development goals in the area of rural development

Mr. KARLSSON (Sweden) said that most speakers had stressed the inseparable link between rural development and efforts to combat poverty, the importance of South-South cooperation, and land reform. Regarding market access, some speakers had stressed that supply had to be adjusted to meet demand; merely increasing investment in agriculture was not enough - above all, production must be tailored to satisfy demand and the requirements of a highly competitive environment. Although AIDS was a major obstacle to rural development, several countries had shown that positive results could be achieved in the fight against the pandemic. Speakers had been unanimous in stressing that reproductive health was important, and that it should be depoliticized and declared a human right. One speaker had stressed that the millennium development goals could not be achieved unless agricultural subsidies were eliminated.

Global partnerships for rural development

Ms. BRIZUELA DE AVILA (El Salvador) said that global partnerships were important for developing a comprehensive rural development strategy. Several speakers had warned against simply applying urban development policies to rural areas and had stressed the need to establish conditions conducive to private investment in rural areas and to make external assistance more predictable. New ideas had been put forward, including one on the use of remittances from emigrant workers to invest in the rural economy. It had been the view of some speakers that, in addition to South-South cooperation, partnerships needed to be established between farmers in the North and those in the South.

Rural/urban interface and slums

Mr. ŠIMONOVIĆ (Observer for Croatia) said that urbanization was an inevitable and beneficial phenomenon for developing countries, provided that housing and infrastructure were developed at the same time. Speakers had agreed that the spread of slums was rooted in poverty. They had recommended the adoption of comprehensive programmes to improve living conditions in slums by developing infrastructure and facilitating commuter travel between villages and the big cities where jobs were concentrated. One way to avoid the spread of slums was to build medium-sized towns with the necessary infrastructure. Generally speaking, an integrated development policy should take account of both rural and urban dwellers, and would require concerted action by local authorities and central governments alike.

The meeting rose at 6.50 p.m.